IN THE HIGH COURT OF JUDICATURE AT MADRAS

DATED: 11.12.2007

CORAM:

THE HONOURABLE MR.JUSTICE P.D.DINAKARAN
AND
THE HONOURABLE MR.JUSTICE R.REGUPATHI

Habeas Corpus Petition No.1588 of 2007

Gopi .. Petitioner

Vs

1. State of Tamil Nadu,
   rep. by its Secretary to Govt.,
   Prohibition and Excise Dept.,
   Fort St. George, Chennai. 600 009

2. The Commissioner of Police,
   Egmore, Chennai - 8 .. Respondents

Petition filed under Article 226 of the Constitution of India for issue of Writ of Habeas Corpus calling for the records pertaining to the Detenu in proceedings No. 323/2007 dated 14.07.2007, passed by the 2nd respondent herein and to set aside the same and direct the respondents to produce the petitioner now detained at central prison, puzhal, chennai 600 066, before this Hon'ble Court and to set him at liberty.

For Petitioner : Mr.S.Samuel Raja Pandian

For Respondents: Mr.N.R.Elango
Additional Public Prosecutor

ORDER

(Order of the Court was made by P.D.DINAKARAN,J.)

The petitioner, who was incarcerated at Central Prison, Puzhal, Chennai, by an order dated 14.7.2007 of the second respondent under the provisions of the Tamil Nadu Prevention of Dangerous Activities of Bootleggers, Drug Offenders, Forest Offenders, Goondas, Immoral Traffic Offenders, Sand Offenders, Slum Grabbers and Video Pirates Act, 1982 (Tamil Nadu Act 14 of 1982) branding him as a Goonda, has filed this petition seeking writ of Habeas Corpus to call for the records in connection with the order of detention passed in proceedings No.323/2007, to set aside the same and to direct the respondents to produce him before this Court and set at liberty.

2. The ground case, which led to the passing of the detention order, came to be registered in S.5 Pallavaram Police Station Crime No.306 of 2007 for offences under Sections 341, 392, 397, 336 and 506(2) IPC. on the basis of the complaint given by one Palani. According to the complainant, on 1.6.2007 at about 8.30 hours, when he was proceeding near Thennanthoppu

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Colony, the detenu along with his associates wrongfully restrained and at the point of knife, threatened him to handover the money. Fearing danger to his life, the complainant raised hue and cry, on hearing which, the public came for his rescue, but the detenu and his associates pelted stones on them and taking away Rs.125/- and the wrist watch from the complainant, the detenu and his associates brandished their knives and created panic at the spot, resulting in the traffic dislocation and taking advantage of the panic situation, they escaped from the spot. On the basis of the crime registered, the detenu was arrested during the course of investigation and produced before Judicial Magistrate, Tambaram, who remanded him to judicial custody.

3. The second respondent, taking note of the above ground case and finding two adverse cases on the file of same police station, in Crime Nos.883/03 and 295/07 for offences under Sections 384, 392 and Man Missing @ 302 IPC., having satisfied that there is compelling necessity to detain the detenu in order to prevent him from indulging in such activities which are prejudicial to the maintenance of public order, ordered his detention dubbing him as a Goonda.

4. Since the learned counsel for the petitioner challenges the impugned order of detention only on the ground of delay in preparing the rejection order, we do not propose to go into other aspects, as the said ground has to succeed.

5.1. Before delving into the issue relating to the delay as contended above, it would be apt to refer the law on the point.

5.2. Article 22(5) of the Constitution of India suggests that the obligation of the government is to offer the detenu an opportunity of making a representation against the order, before it is confirmed according to the procedure laid down under the relevant provisions of law, vide K.M. Abdulla Kunhi v. Union of India, (1991) 1 SCC 476 .

5.3. The right to representation under Article 22(5) of the Constitution of India includes right to expeditious disposal by the State Government. Expedition is the rule and delay defeats mandate of Article 22 (5) of the Constitution of India, vide Ram Sukrya Mhatre v. R.D. Tyagi, 1992 Supp (3) SCC 65.

5.4. Any inordinate and unexplained delay on the part of the Government in considering the representation renders the detention illegal, vide Tara Chand v. State of Rajasthan, (1980) 2 SCC 321 and Raghavendra Singh v. Supdt., Distt. Jail, (1986) 1 SCC 650.

5.5. It is a constitutional obligation of the Government to consider the representation forwarded by the detenu without any delay. Though no period is prescribed by Article 22 of the Constitution for the decision to be taken on the representation, the words “as soon as may be” in clause

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(5) of Article 22 convey the message that the representation should be considered and disposed of at the earliest. But that does not mean that the authority is pre-empted from explaining any delay which would have occasioned in the disposal of the representation. The court can certainly consider whether the delay was occasioned due to permissible reasons or unavoidable causes. If delay was caused on account of any indifference or lapse in considering the representation, such delay will adversely affect further detention of the prisoner. In other words, it is for the authority concerned to explain the delay, if any, in disposing of the representation. It is not enough to say that the delay was very short. Even longer delay can as well be explained. So the test is not the duration or range of delay, but how it is explained by the authority concerned. Even the reason that the Minister was on tour and hence there was a delay of five days in disposing of the representation was rejected by the Apex Court holding that when the liberty of a citizen guaranteed under Article 21 of the Constitution of India is involved, the absence of the Minister at head quarters is not sufficient to justify the delay, since the file could be reached the Minister with utmost promptitude in cases involving the vitally important fundamental right of a citizen, vide Rajammal v. State of T.N., (1999) 1 SCC 417.

6.Coming to the case on hand, admittedly, objecting to the order of detention dated 14.7.2007, a representation was made on behalf of the detenu on 29.10.2007, which was received by the Government on 30.10.2007. Remarks were called for from the detaining authority on 31.10.2007 and the same were received on 12.11.2007. Thereafter, the file was circulated on 13.11.2007 and the Under Secretary and the Additional Secretary considered the same on 14.11.2007. The Minister concerned dealt with the file on 15.11.2007 and rejected the same. However, the rejection letter was prepared only on 21.11.2007 with a delay of six days, which is not properly explained. Even if the intervening holidays, viz. 17.11.2007 and 18.11.2007 (being Saturday and Sunday), are excluded, there is delay of four days in preparing the rejection letter, which is admittedly unexplained and inexcusable. Thereafter, the rejection letter was sent on 22.11.2007 and served on the detenu on 23.11.2007.

7. At this juncture, a reference to the decision of the Apex Court in Kundanbhai Dulabhai Sheikh v District Magistrate, Ahmedabad, (1996) 3 SCC 194 is apposite:

> "In spite of law laid down above by this Court repeatedly over the past three decades, the Executive, namely, the State Government and its officers continue to behave in their old, lethargic fashion and like all other files rusting in the Secretariat for various reasons including red-tapism, the representation made by a person deprived of his liberty, continue to be dealt with in the same fashion. The Government and its officers will not give up their habit of maintaining a consistent attitude of lethargy. So also, this Court will not hesitate in quashing the order of detention to restore the 'liberty and freedom' to the person whose detention is allowed to become bad by the Government itself on account of his

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representation not being disposed of at the earliest."

8. That apart, it is a settled law that there should not be supine indifference, slackness or callous attitude in considering the representation. Any unexplained delay in the disposal of representation would be a breach of the constitutional imperative and it would render the continued detention impermissible and illegal, vide K.M. Abdulla Kunhi v. Union of India, (1991) 1 SCC 476.

9. In the instant case, there is delay of four days in preparing the rejection order, as referred to above, which, in our considered opinion, rendered the detention illegal and hence, we are inclined to allow this petition.

In the result, the order of detention is set aside. The detenu is directed to be set at liberty forthwith unless his presence is required in connection with any other case.

sd/-
Asst.Registrar

/true copy/

Sub Asst.Registrar

sra

To:

1. The Secretary to Government
   of Tamil Nadu, Prohibition and
   Excise Department, Fort St. George,
   Chennai 600 009.

2. The Commissioner of Police,
   Egmore, Chennai.

3. The Superintendent
   Central Prison, Puzhal, Chennai.

4. The Joint Secretary to Government,
   Public (Law & Order) Dept.,
   Fort St. George, Chennai - 9

5. The Public Prosecutor,
   High Court, Madras.

VC(CO)
RP 02.01.2008.

H.C.P.No.1588 of 2007

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